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ABSTRACT

"Whose Problem Is It" is a workshop for middle level students that encourages their participation, input, and ownership in accomplishing change in the middle level school policies, program and procedure. The workshop revolves around making the school environment a happy, healthy, and productive place for learning. It consists of activities on team building, leadership training, and developing skills in the areas of communication, problem solving, time management, self-awareness and caring for self and others. Students identified their successes and roadblocks in their educational experience that impacted the school environment for themselves and others. All six middle level teachers were directly involved in the planning, organization and evaluation of the project. Parents assisted with the oranization and supervision of students. A description of how to organize this type of workshop, a schedule, and a list of resources are provided. (JE)

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WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT!

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Project SEED

the Center
Maine Center for Educational Services

CG026303

WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT!

THE PROJECT:

Whose Problem Is It is a workshop for middle level students encouraging their participation, input and ownership in accomplishing changes in the middle level school policies, program and procedures.

THE GOAL:

Our goal was to encourage our students in grades' 6,7, and 8th grade to become happy, healthy and productive learners that included the following outcomes:

1. To have student ownership of general rules for a better learning environment.
2. To have middle level students work more closely together to build better student relationships across grade levels.
3. To create a school environment that encourages students safe learning (physically, emotionally and academically).
4. To identify behaviors that create roadblocks to learning and to find solutions to these challenges.
5. To encourage positive communication between students and their teachers.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

THE STUDENTS:

Expecting to go to their classes on the first day of school, approximately 100 middle level (6,7,8th) students were surprised when they were sent to the gymnasium upon arrival to school. The program included three half days of workshops beginning upon student arrival at school until lunch time. The workshop consisted of activities on team building, leadership training, and developing skills in the areas of communication, problem solving, time management, self awareness and caring for self and others. Our workshop revolved around making their school environment a happy, healthy and productive place for learning. Students identified their successes and roadblocks in their educational experience that impacted the school environment for themselves and others.

Cooperative games were used as ice breakers and to relieve the stress during the intensive work. Student groups included roles such as facilitators, recorders, time keepers, equipment managers, reporters, and representatives for 3 different steering committees. Developing group cooperative skills included methods of voting, taking turns speaking, appreciating differing opinions and coming to a consensus.

THE STAFF:

All six middle level teachers were directly involved in the planning, organization and evaluation of the project. Each teacher was responsible for segments of each day, taking turns presenting, monitoring or facilitating small and large groups of students. Preparation tasks each days were carried out by members of the team.

Educational technicians and our principal covered duties as the team of teachers evaluated the process, work and behaviors during lunch and after school.

Cafeteria personnel prepared snacks for the group during break in the morning.

THE PARENTS/VOLUNTEERS:

Parents assisted with the organization and supervision of students. We asked them to monitor breaks, distribute snacks, encourage and redirect student needing help. Parents and volunteers were also asked to be process observers, using an evaluation sheet to monitor our work. Inviting them to the workshop was a necessary part of promoting to the community our willingness to produce a change at the middle level.

TIME COMMITMENT:

Although we may have spent fifteen-twenty hours planning this, our first workshop all proceeding workshops have taken us significantly less time. In fact, we may have over planned our workshop, but the careful planning resulted in a successful experience for all.

This workshop was successful in focusing students and teachers on the goal of being happy, healthy and productive learners throughout the school year. New student behavior problems were handled on a smaller scale this, the second year.

PROCEDURES:

Phase I Preplanning:

I. Identify the core team - who's doing what
   a. commitment of time to plan, how often to meet and the availability of people.
   b. agreement on problem to be solved and what the outcome will be
   c. assignment of tasks
      1. set up
      2. facilitator
      3. secretary and materials

4. activities
5. evaluator
6. planning/schedule

Phase 11 Workshop Days

Day 1 8:15-11:15 & 1:00-2:30

a. Gymnasium set up and materials ready
b. Banners up welcoming and directing students
c. Principal directs students off bus to gym
d. Students report to table to sign in for attendance and lunch count.
e. Students move to table to be assigned a working table (12 tables and 12 numbered ping prong balls in a feely can- students take one ball out and the number of the ball corresponds with the number on the table- assigned table.
f. Students socialized until all have signed in . donuts, fruit and juice.
g. Principal gives welcome
h. Facilitator directs students to tables teachers confirm placement
i Cooperative games activity
j. Facilitator directs teams to vote with thumbs
thumb up - agree
thumb sideways - no comment
thumb down - disagree

k. Facilitator asks teams to use voting method to determine team roles. Student choose

1. facilitator-leads table team
2. secretary - writes down group information
3. reporter - reports out to all students
4. errand person - gets materials
5. time keeper - keeps track of time
6. 3 steering committee members

l. Team building activity

m. Assignment number 1 (individual reflection, question 1, what do you need to be successful, happy and comfortable at school) 15 min.

n. Group then shares and records consensus on large paper to share with everyone

n. Report out post on gym walls

o. Recess and Break

p. Steering committee 1 and teacher will go to classroom and compile on the lists on walls and return with one or two consensus statements

q. Students remaining in gym will work on the following statement "What does the school community need to be successful, happy and comfortable at school?" Teacher facilitator clarifies who the school community is.

r. process repeats, individual reflection, group consensus, report out, steering committee #2

s. Homeroom /lunch/recess

t. Steering committee #3 will meet in empty room to combine lists

u. Report out of steering committee #3 what students and school community need to be happy, healthy and productive.

v. Ending activity, homeroom, dismissal

Day 2 8:15-11:25

The second day was a copy of the first day with attendance and lunch count taken in the same manner. Students had a socialization period, team building activity and an overview of the days schedule. Students returned to their previously assigned table and continued with their group roles. By shortening the class periods, teachers met with their students handing out books and other class information. An example of this follows:

11:25-11:35 Period 1 11:35-11:45 Period 2

After lunch recess, (1:00 pm) students gathered for a planting and burial ceremony, throwing roadblock in a box and planting a tree for a new beginning. (Ceremony)

Homeroom time

Day 3 8:15-11:15

Students meet in homeroom and come down to gym for schedule review and work for the morning. Teacher uses an overhead and reviews the work that has been accomplished in the past two days. Students are asked to identify any

problems they might foresee for themselves or for others. When students finish listing the problems, the group will brainstorm a list of solutions.

Recess

Homeroom

Student Council elections were held that afternoon and were entrusted with promoting the positive thoughts of the workshop. Signs listing positive behavioral outcomes, agreed upon by the middle school, were posted in the hallways and classrooms.

RESOURCES:

The Middle Level Institute: effective team building, cooperative skills and group dynamics and time together.

Cooperative Game Books: (*Cooperative Games Book 1 & 2, Silver Bullets*, by Karl Rohnke, cooperative games for ice breakers, mixing students, and stress release.

Circles of Learning, by Johnson and Johnson, (broken circles activity).

Activities taught to the staff at a Camp Kieve Training that previous August.

CONCLUSION:

The middle level team has found student workshops to be a positive solution to overcoming student challenges and staff frustrations. After the staff has identified a persistent

behavior to be changed, our goal is to determine whether it is our problem to correct or a student program to overcome.

This method of intense communication allows the free flow of students thoughts and feelings as well as our concern for their well being. Students later identify consequences and rewards for achievement of their goal. Because of student ownership of the solutions, we have found that students give a sincere effort toward effecting change. Staff encourages students by using visual aids, consistency in rewards and little reminders.

We have put on this workshop for a hundred students or for a class, grade level of twenty-five students. The process is the same in planning and outcome. Both students and staff learn much from the experiences.